

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 28

WALL STREET JOURNAL
1 December 1983

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Soviet Walkout: A First Step

It's been a week since the Soviets stormed out of the medium-range nuclear force negotiations in Geneva, and still no sightings of a nuclear holocaust, television extravaganzas excepted. But then, neither was there any nuclear holocaust between 1953, when the Soviets deployed their first atomic bomb, and 1970, when the first strategic arms limitation talks were held. So it should be clearer than ever that all these years peace has not after all been kept by talks designed to "lessen tension" or "establish a framework of confidence for mutual dialogue." Peace has been kept by American strategic forces. This liberating realization opens up a whole series of options for makers of strategic arms policy.

Soviet behavior leading up to the walkout is a reminder that the Kremlin regards arms talks as little more than a useful propaganda exercise. Given the Soviet Union's substantial edge in intermediate-range forces, it isn't plausible that the Soviets are making all this fuss out of any legitimate fear for their safety. Even with the Euromissiles and the proposed MX thrown into the count, they are deploying several missiles for every one the U.S. does.

A few days before the NATO deployments began, word leaked out that the Soviets might be willing to make the "concession" of not counting British and French missiles in the intermediate-range nuclear force, or INF, talks. Never mind that they had months to bring this proposal properly to the negotiating table, or that the West already had paid for this exclusion by accepting a higher ceiling on Soviet missiles in previous treaties. After deployment, Comrade Andropov, presumably willing to be heard but not seen, issued a four-point Soviet response including such goodies as an end to the "moratorium" on SS-20 deployments in Europe, which somehow hadn't slowed the deployments in the first place.

Now a letter from Chairman Andropov to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl says, "The Soviet Union does not wish to view the existing situation as irreversible." This could mean simply that the West is still welcome to pull out the missiles, but it's enough to send Chancellor Kohl dashing to a news conference to disclose the Kremlin's "willingness" to review and perhaps reverse its walkout. Talks and rumors of talks can be used to sow dissension in the Western alliance.

One can never totally rule out arms-control talks, because they may be fruitful when and if the Soviet leadership undergoes a change in character and ambition, and is prepared to negotiate in good faith. In the meantime, the Soviets have done the West a favor by taking the first step to end the current round of negotiations. Rather than rushing back to the talks, we ought to be running a thorough inventory check on other talks or agreements in the arms-control closet. Given Soviet violations of SALT I, SALT II, the chemical weapons ban and the 1962 agreement on Soviet weapons in Cuba, such a housecleaning is long overdue. Has arms control contributed anything to national security? Has it, in fact, prevented us from defending ourselves?

The answer is clear in at least one instance: the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty. The ABM agreement was a dubious piece of arms control to begin with, based on the Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) tenet that it is absolutely evil to defend yourself against a nuclear attack. The treaty limiting antimissile systems not only stopped the U.S. from exploiting what was then a significant technological advantage, but has inhibited research and development in how to defend ourselves from missile attack, and continues to be a psychological roadblock today.

Meanwhile, the Soviets are building a nationwide ABM, putting up large radars that are the long-lead-

time elements of such a system. In the U.S. intelligence community, Soviet construction of radars and testing of missile interceptors have led not to warnings of clear Soviet capabilities and evident intentions, but to a lot of legalistic quibbling over what is and what is not a violation of the ABM treaty. Not even the most ingenious apologists, though, have been able to interpret the latest radar at Abalakovo as anything but an outright violation.

Yet the U.S. unilaterally has decided to forgo the one option that could swiftly and cheaply address the strategic imbalance, which is to build an ABM of its own. One can argue about the technological feasibility of various systems, as an accompanying article details. But whatever your conclusion on city-protecting systems, it is clearly possible to build non-nuclear antimissile systems that would offer meaningful protection to our Minuteman sites, at a price far cheaper than the MX missile thought necessary because the Minuteman is vulnerable.

So maybe instead of rushing to get the Soviets back to the table, the U.S. should consider walking out of some arms agreements on its own. If we stopped thinking that the only alternatives are negotiating with shysters or blowing up the world, we might actually find ways to defend ourselves.